

Enduring Resilience of Capitalist Power: The Role of Capitalist Education as a Technology of Governance

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Abstract

Capitalism has experienced several crises since its emergence but its present global dominance apparently remains unassailable. This paper argues that capitalism's resilience is grounded in the systemic hegemony of capitalist individuality—an individuality, committed to freedom as an ultimate end and seeking abundance in this world. It has been argued that the successful manufacturing of capitalist subjectivity is significantly dependent on the inculcation of capitalist values to the subject of capital through capitalist education. Section one focuses on freedom as capitalism's telos and sketches the historical emergence of capitalist subjectivity formed by processes of capitalist governance. Section two investigates the formational role of capitalist education as a technology of capitalist governance. It analyzes capitalist education as a means for the construction of capitalist individuality. Section three argues that capitalism's main antagonists, especially Marxist socialism, cannot effectively challenge capitalist hegemony in the lifeworld or at the level of the state because they (i.e. main antagonists) endorse freedom (the

core capitalist value) as an ultimate end in itself. Socialism does not propose to alter the subjectivity of an individual that the capitalist education constructs.

Keywords: capitalism, capitalist education, freedom, socialism, subjectivity

Introduction

Capitalism has emerged from the recent global crisis 2008 somewhat strengthened and apparently unassailable. This has been achieved by enhancing the affectivity of the technologies of freedom which are capitalism's principle instruments of governance. This paper sketches the historical evolution of these technologies and argues that transcending capitalism requires their deconstruction. It argues that such deconstruction cannot be achieved by capitalism's traditional opponent, socialists in particular—primarily because capitalism's avowed opponents do not reject freedom as an ultimate value.

Freedom and the production of capitalist subjectivity

Freedom as an ideal and a creation of the Enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century. From Locke and Rousseau, Kant and Hegel to Marx and Nietzsche all endorse freedom as a value. In other words, the above-mentioned philosophers do not embrace freedom merely as a human capacity, as for example, orthodox Christianity does. Autonomy and self-determination at the level of the individual, the community, or the human race as a whole is endorsed as the supreme value by all Enlightenment thinkers and

their followers to the present day (Bauman, 1983). The achievement or enhancement of freedom in a negative or positive manner has invariably been the pre-eminent *raison d'être* of all Enlightenment projects (Berlin, 2002).

Historically the free individual and free societies have emerged as a consequence of the European transition from feudalism to capitalism and its accompanying colonization of the rest of the world. Capitalism freed men, for they are not born free, as Heidegger asserts that they are thrown into a world they do not choose. Hayek remarks that “freedom is an artifact of civilization made possible by the gradual evolution of the discipline of civilization which is the discipline of freedom” (Hayek, 1979, p. 314). The disciplines of freedom such as capitalist education and the capitalist state are the disciplines of capitalism. Indeed, capital accumulation has been the most potent instrument for the enhancement of freedom.

Capitalism has historically shown itself to be the most effective mode of regulation and organization of free individuality and society. The freeing of the serfs and their reconstitution as a mass of wage laborers who voluntarily sold their labor power for monetary compensation was the first step in the construction of capitalist order. A worker became “a ‘free’ wage laborer who could be freely exploited by capital when not outright enslaved or indentured” (Harvey, 2014, p. 57). Capitalism embodies “a scale of ethical values in which the traditional scheme of Christian values was almost exactly reversed” (Tawney, 1949, p. 191). Concurrently, market friendly state structures were created to render the people committed to the accumulation of wealth.

Technologies of self and societal management have evolved throughout capitalism's history but what remains constant throughout this historical epoch is the rule of capital ensured by the universalization of wage labor. Typically, the capitalist state constructed the free market by educating people to think, reckon and behave as competitive profit and utility maximizing individuals (Moore, 1969). John Dryzek (2004) accentuates the need to formulate and impose specific mechanisms to bring in control the *homo economicus* "behavioral proclivities and their consequences" (Dryzek, 2004, p. 147). The *homo economicus* subjectivity signifies the dedicated employee, the avid consumer, the conscientious bureaucrat, the efficient manager. The successful manufacturing of *homo economicus* is significantly dependent on the inculcation of capitalist values to the subject of capital through capitalist education. Thus, in the modern socio-political landscape, "at the base of the modern social order stands not the executioner but the professor. Not the guillotine, but the (aptly named) *doctorat detat* is the main tool and symbol of state power" (Gellner, 1983, p. 34). The state functionaries and educationists in the capitalist order have played a key role through political and social governance in articulating the rationalities of freedom which determine the modern /hypermodern individual's experiences both of the world he inhabits and of his own self.

The 'normalized' capitalist individual has been produced in history by processes of governance, that is, by strategies for the calculated administration of life in the personal, cultural, economic and political spheres. Producing free individuality is an object of capitalist governance in both society and state, and pursuit of this objective has required the use of a range of social technologies and

social institutionalizations. Building the hospital, the parliament the prison, and more specifically the school, has served as indispensable means for constructing autonomous capitalist individuality. Capitalism governs by freeing the individual in the sphere of the market, the family, and the church by placing these spheres within the ambit of the rule of capital understood as the rule of law.

The organization of urban space to free individuality was a political concern of capitalist countries during the nineteenth century. Capitalist thinking was then haunted by the fear of the mob rioting in concentrated space. The discipline of town planning sought to restructure urban space so as to subject the free individual to the normative gazes of capitalist authority. Police forces were constructed and instructed to control, patrol, inspect and supervise populations at district level. Censuses were conducted to obtain and analyze micro level data. The police operated not through terror but by setting standards of behavior which separated the 'normal' from the 'pathological'. Architectural redesign of streets, squares, parks and access to lighting facilities was a means to institutionalize the expression of disciplined and regulated freedom at the mass level. Museums, exhibitions and playgrounds took the place of the village green, the inn, and the parish church, and served to educate the masses through entertainment, thus popularizing capitalist codes of conduct.

Capitalist education as a technology of governance

Capitalist education has been employed as a significant means for almost unnoticed inculcation of capitalist values to produce capitalist subjectivity. Capitalist education has played a

key role for the social control of physical and mental powers of the individual (Harvey, 1992). The capitalist order is characterized by the “inescapable individuality that pervades all of the thinking around human action in the modern period as defined by the inception of the industrial revolution” (Imre & Griffiths, 2013, p. 99). Thus, it was in the above historical context that the school was reinvented as an instrument for the capitalist ‘normalization’ of the child (Donald, 1992). It normalized and individualized the pupil by a system of periodic examinations, the imparting of secular curricula, the organization of sport, the design of classrooms, the establishment of supervision systems and the implementation of time tables ensuring punctuality. The child was thus subjected to the gaze of capitalist authority. The school defined the behavioral and vocational norms of capitalist order and the child was judged and taught and disciplined himself/herself according to these norms (Foucault, 1977). The school played a key role in the universalization of capitalist rationality. Capital in its essence is pure quantity circulating through concrete substances but realizing itself always in the form of expanded quantity, that is capitalist money. Teaching quantitative disciplines to the normal subject of capital is thus of vital importance because it enables him/her to practice capitalist rationality by calculating all social transactions using capitalist money as a standard.

The growth of electronic mass communication—the television, the worldwide web—and the integration of the latter with education has facilitated the formation and consolidation of capitalist individuality. “Education, training, persuasion, the mobilization of certain social sentiments...all play a role and are plainly mixed in with the formation of dominant ideologies cultivated by the mass

media, religious and educational institutions” (Harvey, 1992, p. 123-124). The media seeks to universalize capitalist values by creating role model images, forming public opinion, and providing advice regarding domestic arrangements. Unanimity of purpose between the dominant public (state) and private (market) agents of capital is nowhere as evident as in the media world and this accounts for the state facilitation of the rapid and extreme concentration of the global media industry since the early 21st century (Upchurch, 2015), that is, antagonistic capitalist and anti-capitalist voices are by and large excluded from global media coverage.

“The monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence” (Gellner, 1983, p. 34). It is the ‘monopoly of legitimate education’ that is responsible for the creation of the expert that continues to dominate most aspects of decision-making in neoliberal capitalist order. The management accountant and the investment banker embody the capitalist norms and values (freedom and equality), which they are inculcated with through education. They rule and manipulate all global markets (through corporate planning). Human relations and legal experts manage the inner life of the corporation. As the family has disintegrated, the role of the marriage counselor, the psychiatrist, the day care center, and old people’s home nurse in managing social life and personal relations has grown exponentially. In all spheres of life opinions and behavior continue to be formed by experts who legitimize the universalization of capitalist rationality.

The contemporary postmodern education and the prevalence of neoliberalism has an inner connection. Neoliberalism has succeeded as a social economic project because it has implanted

what Nicholas Rose and Miller (1992) call ‘freely enacted activity’. It has succeeded in individualizing the antagonistic subject of capital to an extent never achieved by the classical liberalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The postmodern individual articulates his/her truth and pursues his/her good through the constant exercise of choice. His/her particular choices and calculative evaluations reflect the primacy of the choice for choice itself (capital). Thus, the antagonistic subject of capital has acquired a new self-understanding which delegitimizes the quest for participation in a community. The subject of capital has developed a new commitment to self-satisfaction and self-achievement. Capital has been humanized not just in the work process, but throughout capitalist order by the atomization of its subjects. Thus the atomized subject of capital is supremely concerned with the trivialities of his everyday life. He is contemptuous of all grand narratives. He takes capitalist order –its ethos, its rationalities, its power structures, its cultures –for granted and seeks self-achievement within the capitalist lifeworld, for in his view there can be no alternative.

The purpose of the science of psychology is not to seek wisdom and knowledge for the sake of inner growth of personality but to strategize knowledge for enhancing the productivity of the employees and fueling the desires of the potential consumers. In other words, “Knowledge itself becomes a commodity... Knowledge of man himself, psychology, which...was held to be the condition for virtue...has degenerated into an instrument to be used for better manipulation of others and oneself, in market research, in political propaganda, in advertising, and so on” (Fromm, 2013,

p. 76). Technologies of consumption—advertising, designing, marketing—construct the relationship between self-identification and commodity choice through a deliberate application of psychological conceptions of human behavior. An efficient marketing and advertising professional today must constantly brush up his/her knowledge of applied psychology which teaches him/her to develop marketing strategies that intensify desires which can be satisfied through increased and increasingly differentiated commodities the production and sale of which generate surplus for capital accumulation. These technologies teach him/her how to turn commodities and their images into instruments for personality enrichment. Commodities emit a social glow which is cast upon their consumer who basks in this light. To turn consumables into desire is the supreme purpose of market researchers, advertisers and marketing strategists. Consumption—specially of images (*i.e.* spectacles of electronic and print media) – has become a prime tranquilizer for soothing anxieties in hypermodern capitalist civil society.

The subject of capital is today ‘free to choose’ because he has been convinced that the choice for choice itself is the uniquely rational choice which expresses one’s individuality. One freely chooses subsumption in the capitalist order and freely endorses the view that there is no alternative to the capitalist lifeworld. The manager, the doctor, the therapist and other subjects of capital, that exercise authority in the capitalist lifeworld, are manufactured by the technologies of governance, specifically, education. A common citizen and a consumer achieve freedom by submission to the authority of the manager, the doctor, the therapist, a secular politician, the media scientist, and the fashion designer. In short

the autonomous individual achieves freedom by submitting to the authority of capitalist rationality and of the experts who effectively practice this rationality. In this sense freedom and its governance technologies such as capitalist education have been employed for the construction of capitalist individuality.

Transcending capitalism

The hypermodern subject of capital is ubiquitous throughout metropolitan capitalist order—not just in Europe and America but also in China, Japan and most emergent economies. In these countries there are few significant social forces or social discourses seriously challenging hypermodern capitalist individuality. Marx's 'species being' has not appeared on the pages of history except for very brief periods. However, Marx is also committed to the Enlightenment conception of rationality; therefore, he recognizes no limitation to the abundance of production and desire for consumption.

The new work culture is characterized by “autonomy... delayering of hierarchies, multitasking, openness to others, sensitivity to differences, informality and inter personal contacts” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007, p. 97). Exploitation and distributional inequalities become more acceptable to workers as work process autonomy and flexibility is enhanced. Class consciousness and the struggle against liberal state order became diffused. Today union density and number of days lost due to strike action are lower than ever throughout the capitalist world. As the subject of capital becomes an 'entrepreneur of the self' the possibility of the appearance of the species being becomes more and more illusory.

The key question of course is how the subject of capital can be won over to the ideology and practices of sustainable human development? Neither the Marxist eco-socialists nor the Pope advocate a reduction in aggregate global production/consumption. Deconstructing capitalist individuality is not on the Catholic or the Marxist eco-socialist agenda. “Foucault attacks Marxists because they believe that they have deciphered the secret of history. For him [Foucault], history is discontinuous and Marxism is a global totalitarian theory which is out of date” (Sarup, 1988, p. 106). As long as the individual remains committed to capitalist values—freedom, equality and progress—his activism and his protest will not threaten capitalist rationality. From within, capitalism is threatened by environmental catastrophes. If “sustainable development” is not achieved capitalism might become the end of human history. Moreover, post modernists from Lyotard to Foucault to Deleuze to Derrida have argued retaining faith in Enlightenment ontology and epistemology is becoming problematic. The impossibility of achieving freedom has been demonstrated by structuralists, for example, in declaring that “freedom and independence is a purely symbolic, mythical expression of a spurious subjectivity” (Clarke, 1981, p. 107).

It is evident from this analysis that neither socialism nor Christianity poses a serious threat to capitalist order because neither of them challenges the value of freedom nor proposes an alternative program for unraveling and restructuring the capitalist subjectivity manufactured by the technologies of capitalist governance, specifically capitalist education.

Overcoming the existential threat which the ‘extremist’ poses

to capitalist order requires a revival of faith in capitalism's ontological and epistemological presumptions. To do this "capitalism... will have to overcome its underlying class contradiction... [which] would mean the adoption of a new principle of organization. Such a principle would involve a universalistic morality" (Held, 1997, p. 295). The adoption of a new capitalist principle of organization would require the resumption of belief in capitalism as a metanarrative, whereas, according to postmodernists, "the certainties and metanarratives of the modern era are no longer sustainable" (Watson, 2011, p. 71). However, the construction of new 'golden ages' for global capitalism (under Chinese hegemony, for example) may not be impossible. Capitalism's survival is not at stake as long as the subject of capital remains committed to the Enlightenment values of freedom, equality and progress, values enthusiastically endorsed both by socialist and capitalist technologies of governance.

Conclusion

The key source of capitalist resilience is the subjectivity that has been produced by the technologies of capitalist governance, and that has historically transformed the virtue-directed individual into a subject of capital. Capitalism remains unchallenged in terms of the subjectivity constructed by the technologies of governance such as capitalist education. Antagonists of capitalism such as Marxist socialism do not pose a serious challenge to the dominance of capitalism, essentially, because it does not question, but approves the value of freedom, central to capitalist order. Capitalism also continues to have the potential for the accumulation of wealth.

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